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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirtieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 781st MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 22 May 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Guinea-Bissau (continued) (CRC/C/3/Add.63; CRC/C/Q/GUIB/1; written replies of the Government of Guinea-Bissau to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in French only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Guinea-Bissau took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) agreed that there seemed to be an inconsistency in the information provided with regard to the law adopted in 1997 for the protection of women and children. He had been serving as a juvenile court judge at the time, and recalled that a revision procedure had been in hand for that legislation. His delegation would look into the matter when it returned to Guinea-Bissau, with a view to providing precise information for the Committee. It was hoped to complete, by 2004, a data compilation programme initiated in 2000.

3. Mr. DIONISO CABI (Guinea-Bissau), referring to government measures to safeguard children's rights with regard to education and health in particular, said that the tasks were carried out at three levels: central government, regional government and local administrations. Regional governors were informed of government policy and of action required at the regional level, and local administrations were responsible for implementing all relevant measures. Local authorities also informed communities of government policy and action - for example, by conducting vaccination awareness campaigns.

4. Details of the Convention, like all instruments and decisions ratified by Parliament, were published in the Official Bulletin. The text of the Convention was available in Portuguese; unfortunately, however, there was no standard script for the Creole language, although studies were in hand with a view to developing one.

5. Premature marriage, a tradition that had always existed, was becoming much less prevalent as a result of awareness campaigns as well as a change in attitude among young people influenced by schooling that had been previously unavailable. Progress in that regard had been monitored, particularly in the Gabu and Bafata regions. Likewise, the traditional practices of disposing of children born disabled or deformed, and of keeping only one child of twin births, had been strongly discouraged by the post-colonial authorities, by means of information campaigns and severe criminal sanctions. Those practices no longer prevailed among any of the country's ethnic groups. Albinos were extremely rare; he himself had met only three, one of whom was a Vice-President of the Supreme Court. They were certainly not discriminated against.

6. Women were being increasingly integrated into government and other public services, as a result of a non-discrimination policy.

7. Young people's associations had been established to uphold the various social interests of youth; they had considerable impact and scope, and received a great deal of attention. The

National People's Assembly's Commission on Women and Children worked closely with such associations. The latter also participated in the National Parliament for the Child, whose proceedings were widely disseminated. The period 1 to 16 June would be devoted to promoting awareness of the rights of children in society; many sporting and cultural events would be held, with emphasis on the rights of women and children, during that time.

8. On the subject of child soldiers, although there was no reliable information, it seemed that both parties to the 1998-1999 conflict - the Government and the military junta - had begun to accept children as the fighting had proceeded. At the end of the conflict, the victors had recorded 119 child soldiers on the defeated side but produced no record relating to their own. Children, whether soldiers or not, had been traumatized by the conflict; the Government, with UNICEF's collaboration, was striving to help them overcome their problems. Its efforts had included the engaging of a French psychiatrist to train Guinean counsellors, as well as provision of food and assistance to children and their families. Results had been encouraging, except in cases of wounded or disabled children, and the Government intended to go on providing support for the families. The Institute for the Protection of Women and Children was making an important contribution in that regard.

9. Ms. KHATTAB asked whether children in army service could serve as combatants or whether they were confined to administrative tasks, and whether the law made a distinction in that regard.

10. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said that the minimum age for army service prescribed by law was 18 years. It was known that the restriction had not been respected during the conflict in question.

11. Ms. KARP said she had the impression that there was no minimum age limit for voluntary enlistment, and wondered whether it was intended to introduce minimum age legislation, bearing in mind the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

12. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said that, before the 1998-1999 conflict, the average age in his country's army had been the highest in the region, with records indicating that soldiers had been aged 20 years and above. Although it was clear that children had become involved as combatants during the conflict, peace had brought an end to their enlistment, which was prohibited under current legislation.

13. With regard to registration of births, a 30-day deadline had been in effect, with a fine of 2,500 CFA francs for failure to comply. In view of the lack of access to both fixed and mobile registration facilities, and of the attendant risks such as trafficking in unregistered children, the Government had decided to provide for free registration. However, the loss of fee and fine revenue represented a considerable cost to a low-income country such as Guinea-Bissau. The authorities were currently conducting a registration campaign, with UNICEF cooperation, in the Gabu and Bafata regions, but the campaign might have to be suspended when the rainy season began in October.

14. Although Guinea-Bissau contained many refugees, there was no UNHCR presence in the country. Many refugees had been welcomed, chiefly from Sierra Leone and Liberia, and a few from Guinea-Conakry.

15. With regard to the national budget, the country's income capacity, like that of many others, could not cover all essential costs. Over 70 per cent of social funding came from outside sources, the Government's programmes being supported by international bodies such as UNICEF and WHO.

16. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said that since 1986 children born outside marriage had enjoyed exactly the same rights as those born within marriage and there was no discrimination against them. He said the State was trying to reduce the problems of children with disabilities, but it was difficult to help them because there was no specialist centre.

17. Discotheques and cinemas were required to check children's identity cards to ensure they were old enough to be admitted. Children who were out after 10 p.m. might be asked to explain why and their parents might be asked how such a situation had arisen. Such an approach helped to avoid crime against children.

18. Intercountry adoption existed but it was rare, since family solidarity was still very strong in Guinea-Bissau. If such a measure was decreed by court order, an investigation was required into the moral and financial situation of the adopting family, and the adopting couple must be married.

19. In reply to a question by Ms. Tigerstedt-Tähtelä, he explained that the institution of mininos de criaçon (CRC/C/3/Add.63, para. 138 (b)) was a form of adoption: children were given away to be brought up by another family. However, there was no supervision of such arrangements and problems had been known to arise, including children working as virtual slaves. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) - and women's NGOs in particular - were currently engaged in combating the practice.

20. Ms. SARDENBERG wondered what implications the fact that, according to customary laws, children were educated "according to the cultural values of each ethnic group" (para. 138) had for children who needed to be separated from their parents.

21. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said that, given the strength of family solidarity, it was rare for a child to be brought up by a member of a different tribe. In the isolated cases where it occurred, the child should be reared according to the cultural values of its own tribe. However, since the cultural values of all the tribes of Guinea-Bissau were very similar, that did not represent a problem.

22. In reply to a question concerning recovery of maintenance, he said it was certainly a problem, given the deficiencies of social services. If the person involved was a public official, the court could order maintenance to be recovered directly from his or her pay. Application could also be made for direct recovery if the person was resident in a country that had a reciprocal enforcement arrangement with Guinea-Bissau.

23. Mr. CITARELLA, referring to paragraph 184 of the report, asked whether the laws on assistance to abandoned or neglected children were in fact enforced.

24. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said that the two centres referred to had been established by law but were not operational. The only orphanage was the one referred to in paragraph 183 of the report, which was not State-run but private.

25. State support for large families did not exist, since social services were nearly non-operational.

26. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said she understood that Guinea-Bissau's International Monetary Fund (IMF)-supported poverty reduction strategy was nearly complete. In what way would the strategy assist poor families to purchase medicines, which, according to the report, many people could not afford?

27. Mr. MENDES said it would not be accurate to say that the poverty reduction strategy was nearly complete. International cooperation was still needed, in accordance with the Convention, to overcome problems the country could not resolve itself. With regard to purchase of medicines, in isolated cases the State would buy medicines or pay for a patient to travel elsewhere for care that was not available locally.

28. In reply to a question concerning the lack of convictions for violence, he said that any perpetrator who was identified was prosecuted and punished in accordance with the law. Corporal punishment was prohibited in schools, although incidents had occurred in Koranic schools: in such cases the perpetrators were punished.

29. The State was doing as much as possible to deal with the problem of HIV/AIDS. The World Bank had funded a programme of condom distribution and education, and an NGO was working to promote education and purchase retroviral treatment, since such medicines were unaffordable. Help was needed from the wealthier, developed countries.

30. Ms. KARP said that, judging from the written replies (p. 5), it seemed the only cases of violence that reached the courts were those that received sufficient publicity.

31. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said that where perpetrators of violence were identified they were punished.

32. Ms. SARDENBERG asked whether she was correct in understanding that corporal punishment was prohibited by law. What was the situation with regard to violence within families - had any studies been done in that area?

33. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said it was very difficult to know the true situation with regard to violence within families. It was often regarded as a private matter and, although the victim was fully entitled to report incidents and perpetrators could be punished by the courts, women in particular often preferred to remain silent.

34. Ms. KARP asked what the official policy was on domestic violence. Was it a private matter if a woman did not come forward? She wondered whether victims were encouraged to bring complaints and whether there were special units or procedures within the police and the courts with the necessary sensitivity to deal with such complaints without re-victimizing the victim.

35. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said that he would certainly encourage victims to report incidents, but people were reluctant to do so. If the authorities learned of a case, the perpetrator was punished.

36. Mr. CABI (Guinea-Bissau) said the problem involved lack of awareness, illiteracy and traditional values. A woman living in a town might experience no problems as a result of lodging a complaint, but a woman living in a village would find it very difficult. If she wanted her marriage to remain intact, she did not complain. That was the reality of the situation.

37. Ms. KHATTAB wondered whether the extended family could be encouraged to help raise awareness and change negative attitudes towards women.

38. Mr. CABI (Guinea-Bissau) said that was indeed the role of the family elders. In addition, local representatives could report incidents of violence to the sectoral administrative authorities. Nevertheless, the only real solution was an increase in literacy, which would make it possible to promote a perception of the police as a body that could assist in reconciliation rather than as an enemy.

39. The CHAIRPERSON asked what government policy was on family planning, abortion and infanticide.

40. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) said there was a national-level NGO that worked in the area of family planning to sensitize people to the issues and distribute contraceptives. Such ideas were not acceptable to all women, but 70 per cent of women used the NGO's services. Infanticide was defined as an offence in the Criminal Code; it was a long time since any case had been reported, however.

41. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to put questions to the delegation relating to basic health and welfare, education, leisure and cultural activities and special protection measures.

42. Ms. SARDENBERG, referring to the fact that the Ministry of Public Health was heavily dependent on external funds, asked whether the Government planned to increase the proportion of the national budget devoted to health care. It would be interesting to learn whether steps had been taken to implement the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) strategy developed by UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO). The reporting State should indicate whether the practice of female genital mutilation was still widespread. According to the written replies, a significant number of babies were born with a low birth-weight and many children suffered from malnutrition; it was unclear whether the Government had introduced any specific programmes to address those problems.

43. On the issue of education, she said that although the State party was participating in the "Education for All" programme adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), boys continued to enjoy better access to education than girls; there were also significant disparities between the educational services provided in different regions. Further information should be provided about the measures adopted in the country to provide free basic education for all children. According to the report, school curricula included recreational, cultural and sporting activities. It would be interesting to learn whether children who did not attend school - over half of all children - were able to participate in such activities, especially as there were allegedly no parks in Guinea-Bissau.

44. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that additional information should be provided about adolescent health. It would be useful to know whether sexual education classes were provided in schools to address early sexual behaviour and whether any support was given to pregnant teenagers, enabling them to continue their studies.

45. The reporting State should indicate whether any steps had been taken to improve sanitation, as poor access to drinking water was a major cause of death in the State party. It was unclear whether any programmes had been introduced to encourage breastfeeding.

46. The State party had indicated that it received a significant amount of foreign aid, although it had failed to outline the impact of that aid on its programmes. She would be interested to know whether the 20/20 Initiative or any other initiatives aimed at increasing the expenditure on basic social services had been implemented in Guinea-Bissau, and what the outcome had been.

47. With regard to education, she expressed concern that over half the children of school age did not attend school, as primary schooling should be free and compulsory. In addition, drop-out rates were high. According to the State party's initial report, the illiteracy rate was high and stagnant. Most of the spending on education went to paying teachers' salaries; very little went towards improving the quality of education or encouraging children to attend school. She would be interested to know whether the Government planned to reform the educational system to address those problems. The delegation should also clarify the meaning of the term "cooperative schools", mentioned in paragraph 215 of the report.

48. It would be useful to know whether the Government had carried out any research into why there were such low levels of birth registration. It was possible that the cost was a deterrent. Although a free birth registration campaign had been launched in 2001 with the support of UNICEF, more efforts were needed to establish a more permanent and systematic birth registration system. Additional information should be provided about measures adopted to address the continuing problem of violence against children. Lastly, she would be interested to know whether the Government had taken any steps to educate people about peace and tolerance, given the multi-ethnic nature of the society.

49. Mr. Al-SHEDDI said it was important to know what measures were being taken by the Government to reduce the high illiteracy rate and to increase school attendance rates, as most of the State party's problems were linked to the low levels of education. He recognized that the Government had limited resources; nevertheless, steps that did not require much funding could

be taken to improve the situation. For example, the Government could improve cooperation with local communities and encourage the establishment of informal educational centres, which would be less costly than formal schools. Had any campaigns been launched to raise awareness of the importance of education and to encourage parents to send their children to school?

50. According to reports, corporal punishment continued to be practised in schools, despite the fact it was prohibited by law. The reporting State should indicate how it intended to remedy the situation.

51. Ms. KHATTAB said that the State party should indicate whether any measures had been taken to address the growing problem of child labour. Additional information should be provided about measures adopted to prevent the sexual exploitation of children; according to the report, prostitution among young people had reached alarming proportions, due to the economic and social situation of the country. Had the Government implemented any programmes to reintegrate victims into society? In some countries, people believed that HIV/AIDS could be cured by having sex with a child; was that belief widespread in Guinea-Bissau? It would be interesting to learn whether steps had been taken to cooperate with neighbouring countries in order to control the trafficking of children; for example, had the principle of extraterritoriality been incorporated in the legislation to criminalize the sexual exploitation of children by nationals of a State party when committed in other countries? Greater efforts had to be made to raise awareness of the problem of child exploitation.

52. Ms. AL-THANI said that the report revealed many shortcomings with regard to children with disabilities. While she welcomed the fact that severe penalties were dealt against people who killed children with disabilities, further efforts should be made to educate people to ensure that the law was not the only deterrent. She would like to know whether any constitutional amendments had been made to take into account people with disabilities other than veterans. It was unclear in which year the survey of disabled people referred to in the report (table 1) had been carried out; she suspected it had been conducted before the war and that the figures provided were likely to be a gross underestimation of the real situation. Since the war, landmines had caused a great number of disabilities among children. The State party should provide more up-to-date statistics on children with disabilities, also indicating how many disabled children attended mainstream schools. It was unclear why epilepsy and tuberculosis had been classed in the survey as "disabilities". The term "mental backwardness" was unacceptable and the meaning of the term "language disability" should be clarified. The State party should indicate how it was funding projects for people with disabilities, as the funding previously provided by the Netherlands for such projects had come to an end.

53. On the issue of health, she said that traditional medicine could play an important role in resolving health problems if it was properly controlled. She failed to understand why the emergence of private clinics had led to a reduction in the quality of health services in hospitals.

54. Ms. KARP said it was disappointing that only 1 per cent of children of school age had access to nurseries, kindergartens and other similar institutions. Had the Government considered introducing any early childhood education policies to ensure that children were better prepared to enter elementary school?

55. On the issue of juvenile justice, she expressed concern that no statistics had been provided on the number of children involved with the police or held in pre-trial detention. Given that the age of criminal responsibility was fixed at 16, it would be interesting to learn whether there were any special procedures to deal with children 16 to 18 who were in conflict with the law. The State party should indicate whether judges were provided with special training on how to deal with juveniles. Information should be provided about measures taken to address the problem of street children. Had any projects been introduced to reintegrate such children into society?

56. Mr. CITARELLA said that the shortcomings of the health services in Guinea-Bissau were largely due to poor management. Improvements could be made if more health professionals were made available. It was unclear whether or not citizens had to pay for health care. In its written replies, the State party made reference to a number of initiatives to improve the health services in the country; however, it concluded that although there had been a significant reduction in the infant mortality rate, there had been a negative evolution of the main health indicators in recent years and the health situation of children had deteriorated. The matter needed clarification.

57. With regard to education, he expressed concern that the basic standards of education were so poor. The efforts made to reduce illiteracy in the State party had not had a major impact and had benefited only men: according to the written replies, the illiteracy rate for men had dropped to 63 per cent in 2000, while the rate for women remained constant at 76 per cent. School drop-out rates were alarmingly high: almost a third of children dropped out in the first year of studies, and less than half completed their fourth year. He failed to understand why the State party saw the Basic Education Support Project, funded by the World Bank, in such a negative light.

58. Ms. CHUTIKUL asked whether there were any specific measures to encourage girls to attend school. It would also be useful to know whether the Government had introduced a national child protection policy, as efforts needed to be made to coordinate and monitor activities in that field. The State party should outline the specific role played by NGOs in the field of child protection. It was clear that a lot of work needed to be done in order to guarantee the rights of the child in Guinea-Bissau; therefore, it would be useful if the delegation could indicate what it considered to be the three areas that needed to be addressed as a matter of priority. She would be interested to know whether the delegation, which comprised a representative of the Ministry of Justice, would be able to persuade other Ministries to act accordingly.

59. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said that despite the fact that Guinea-Bissau had been granted debt relief of about 85 per cent of its debt and continued to be heavily dependent on external resources, the international financial institutions expected the country to continue its commitment to the financial and economic programme supported by the International Monetary Fund's Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility and to implement an agreed set of measures in the context of its poverty reduction strategy. In her view, the State party was caught in a vicious circle when it came to debt relief. She would be interested to learn how the Government viewed the matter.

The meeting was suspended at 5.10 p.m. and resumed at 5.25 p.m.

60. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau), replying to a question on Government programmes for the improvement of health, said that a programme was currently running in cooperation with UNICEF/WHO to combat common conditions such as dehydration, diarrhoea and malnutrition, which so far had yielded good results. Genital mutilation was prohibited under the Criminal Code, although it was still common in rural areas. It was hoped that an awareness campaign would help to eliminate the practice in the long term.

61. In reply to a question on the high numbers of children not attending school and the need to improve recreational facilities, he said that the few existing facilities had mostly been destroyed during the war. Efforts were being made to solve the problem with international cooperation. With regard to the problem of girls becoming sexually active at an early age and whether measures were taken to assist them, he explained that some sex education did exist in schools.

62. On the question of drinking water, the World Bank and UNICEF were financing a project to dig wells in villages where water shortages were a serious problem, but the project did not cover all regions as yet. He confirmed that the Bamako Initiative to ensure affordable primary health services was being implemented in Guinea-Bissau. In hospitals people had to pay for medicines, even though the prices were symbolic. There were also private clinics and pharmacies but their medicines were more expensive.

63. In reply to a question on Government measures to reduce the high drop-out rate in schools, he said that a programme had been launched, supported by an NGO, in the regions with the highest drop-out rates - Gabu and Bafata. The NGO encouraged children, particularly girls, to continue going to school by buying them the necessary stationery and taking food to them at lunchtime. An awareness-raising campaign was also being planned. He explained that the Government was unable to provide State schools in all areas of the country and therefore cooperative schools had been set up by individual groups in some areas. Unlike the State school system where schooling was almost free, children attending cooperative schools paid a fee.

64. The problem of violence against children was recurrent and an awareness-raising campaign needed to be launched to reduce it. Family advisers played an important role with regard to violence. When war had broken out in the country the Secretary-General of the United Nations had sent a Special Representative, who had sought to resolve problems peacefully by organizing seminars on peace and attempting to reconcile the different tribes and ethnic groups. That had been a very useful exercise and action along the same lines should be taken with regard to violence against children.

65. The Government recognized the need to reduce illiteracy, which was a severe problem that affected the entire country. The literacy programmes run by NGOs were very important because schooling should be given the highest priority.

66. He did not agree that parents had lost confidence in the school system and were no longer sending their children to school. That might have been the situation in the past, when those who

finished their schooling had received a salary that would not even feed their families. However, that concern had now disappeared and a comparison of statistics showed that attendance rates were much higher than in the past.

67. With regard to legislation on child labour, a general law existed prohibiting the employment of children under 14 years. From 16 years and upwards children could begin to work full-time, with the exception of arduous and/or night work. In rural areas it was more difficult to implement the law because many children assisted their families from a very early age, even though it was officially prohibited.

68. The CHAIRPERSON asked why 60 per cent of all school-age children were not in school.

69. Mr. CABI (Guinea-Bissau) said that in rural areas most children worked on the land and were not covered by State institutions protecting their rights. Although the employment of children under the age of 15 was prohibited, parents often employed children from early morning until nightfall, especially during the rainy season. If the State was informed of that fact, measures were taken at regional level, but the system was not always effective because those denouncing child labour to the authorities were ostracized within the community. Parents who gradually encouraged their children to take on more tasks, however, were not punished. Under customary law it was natural for children to work within their community. Such work was considered to be a rite of passage on the road to adulthood, even though it did not fall within the provisions of the Convention.

70. Strict measures were in place to combat the trafficking of children, in accordance with international conventions. Unless it was proved that a child had a family link to the person with whom he/she was travelling, it was not possible to remove the child from the country. The details of a child had to be officially entered into an adult's passport with a photo and the adult had to be in possession of a permit of safe conduct for the child. It was possible to falsify those documents, although without a photo of the child the papers would be invalid. Persons trying to enter Senegal from Guinea-Bissau with children would immediately be asked to hand over the children's documents. However, although such informal measures were in place no formal, intergovernmental or subregional agreement existed.

71. The sexual exploitation of children was prohibited at both regional and sectoral level and detested by the population in general. It was therefore difficult to understand why marriages with minors still occurred. Under customary law, sexual relations with a minor before marriage were prohibited and could be reported to the authorities. Some traditional beliefs concerning the issue actually had a positive effect. For example, many people thought that a person having sexual relations with a child would be cursed and others believed that sexual relations with minors outside marriage was the primary cause of AIDS; those beliefs served to protect minors. Tuberculosis and other afflictions such as speech impediments were also traditionally attributed to sexual practices. In the past tuberculosis sufferers had been isolated, but they now received treatment in centres that had been set up with international assistance.

72. The Government's other priorities for child welfare were good stewardship, reducing the illiteracy rate and increasing school attendance rates. It had set up a body to monitor child welfare indicators and had decided to increase budget expenditure on health and education.

73. The CHAIRPERSON requested information on the issue of juvenile delinquency. He asked whether 16 was the age of criminal responsibility and how children under 16 years were dealt with by the justice system.

74. Mr. CABI (Guinea-Bissau) said that although there were serious obstacles to combating delinquency, the Government was doing its best to monitor the problem. No special units existed for detained child offenders, even though the Criminal Code stated that they should be taken care of by competent authorities. The only prison facility capable of receiving adequate numbers of prisoners had been destroyed in the 1998 war.

75. Mr. MENDES (Guinea-Bissau) confirmed that the age of criminal responsibility was 16 years and that child offenders from 16 to 18 were tried but given reduced sentences. Penalties for adults were halved in the case of children. Minors were supposed to be placed in special reintegration centres; however, the only existing centre had been destroyed during the war. In some cases children were detained together with adults, which led to complications. That problem required an urgent solution and the Government was doing its best to find one.

76. Ms. SARDENBERG recommended that special protection measures should be implemented to improve the juvenile justice system, with the separation of children from adult detainees.

77. She thanked the delegation for its replies to the Committee's questions and for a very positive dialogue. The country's ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Landmine Protocol to the Convention on Conventional Weapons and the birth registration campaign were encouraging factors. Despite the many problems the country was facing, the presence of the delegation at the session was proof of the Government's commitments to its obligations under the Convention. The Committee wished to see the Convention as a catalyst for change in Guinea-Bissau and believed that awareness-raising about its provisions and the training of professional groups working with children would boost the process of democratization and development in the country. She recommended that the Government should continue to harmonize its domestic legislation with the provisions of the Convention, with special attention to its general principles. A more systematic approach should be taken to cooperation with NGOs, possibly through the introduction of a new law.

78. Mr. CABI (Guinea-Bissau) thanked the Chairperson and the members of the Committee and expressed satisfaction at the progress made. The Committee's recommendations would be given serious consideration and he hoped that Guinea-Bissau's next report to the Committee would show a clear improvement in the situation.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.